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THE OMEN.

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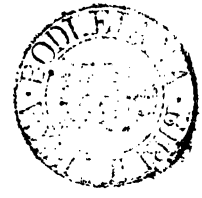
THE OMEN.

CAN SUCH THINGS BE
AND OVERCOME US LIKE A SUMMER CLOUD
WITHOUT OUR SPECIAL WONDER?



WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH:
AND T. CADELL, LONDON.
MDCCCXXV.

249. s. 239.

THE OMEN.

EPOCH I.

CHAP. I.

* * * * Even my childhood was joyless, and a mystery overshadows all my earliest recollections. Sometimes, on the revisitations of the past, strange and obscure apparitional resemblances leave me in doubt whether they are indeed the memory of things which have been, or but of the stuff that dreams are made of.

The vision of a splendid mansion and many servants, makes me feel that I am, as it were,

still but a child, playing with an orange on the carpet of a gorgeous room. A wild cry and a dreadful sound frighten me again; and as I am snatched up and borne away, I see a gentleman lying bleeding on the steps of a spacious staircase, and a beautiful lady distractedly wringing her hands.

While yet struggling in the strangling grasps of that fearful night-mare, a change comes upon the spirit of my dream, and a rapid procession of houses and trees, and many a green and goodly object, passes the window of a carriage in which I am seated, beside an unknown female, who sheds tears, and often caresses me.

We arrive at the curious portal of a turretted manorial edifice:—I feel myself lifted from beside my companion, and fondly pressed to the bosom of a venerable matron, who is weeping in the dusky twilight of an ancient chamber, adorned with the portraits of war-

riors. A breach in my remembrance ensues; and then the same sad lady is seen reclining on a bed, feeble, pale, and wasted, while sorrowful damsels are whispering and walking softly around. * * * *

She laid her withered hand upon my head, as I stood at her pillow. It felt like fire, and, shrinking from the touch, I pushed it away, but with awe and reverence; for she was blessing me in silence, with such kind and gentle eyes! My tears still flow afresh, whenever I think of those mild and mournful eyes, and of that withered and burning hand.

I never beheld that sad lady again; but some time after the female who brought me in the carriage led me by the hand into the room where I had seen her dying. It was then all changed; and on the bed lay the covered form of a mysterious thing, the sight of which filled my infantine spirit with solem-

nity and dread. The poor girl, as she looked on it, began to weep bitterly; I, too, also wept, but I knew not wherefore; and I clung to her, overwhelmed with the phantasma of an unknown fear.

CHAP. II.

After the funeral of my grandmother, I was conveyed, by the same affectionate girl, in another carriage, to a lone house in a distant part of the country, where she consigned me to the care of an aged gentlewoman, of a serene and benign countenance.

The house stood on a bleak rising ground, overlooking a little bay, along the western skirts of which a few fishermen's huts formed a scattered hamlet. The eastern side was a rugged promontory, and tall cliffs and huge rocks beetled and frowned upon the restless ocean, that for ever chafed and murmured on the sandy margin at their feet.

When I had been some three or four days in that unvisited and solitary house, the venerable lady took me by the hand, and led

me to walk on the smooth beach below the cliffs.

It was in the cool of a calm summer-evening. The waves, as they slowly rippled on the sand, churmed, as it were, a lullaby: the air was hushed with the holy stillness of the Sabbath; and the sea-birds, as they flew between me and the dark precipices, shone like silvery stars. A stately ship lay becalmed in the offing. The fishermen, who had been on board, were returning towards the shore; and the glancing of their oars appeared to the simplicity of my young imagination as if they were wantonly breaking the beautiful glassiness of the peaceful ocean.

A gentleman, who was sitting on a rock, started up, as we came unexpectedly upon him, and hastily retired. Something in his appearance arrested my attention; and I followed him with my eyes till he disappeared behind another jutting fragment of the precipice.

He had lately become the inhabitant of a little cottage, which stood in a niche of the cliffs. No one could tell whence he had come: all that was known concerning him was in the ravelled circumstances of an uncredited tale told by a poacher, who, being abroad in the night, on his unlawful vocation, saw a black boat passing athwart the disk of the moon, (then just emerging from the sea,) and making towards a vessel under sail. A solitary man was at the same time seen coming from the beach—one who had doubtless been landed from that vessel. Next morning, about break of day, the gentleman whom we had disturbed applied at the cottage for some refreshment, and finding in the only inmate the needy widow of a fisherman, he persuaded her to take him for a guest, and with her he had continued to lead a companionless life.

The fishermen, sometimes moved by curiosity, threw themselves in his way, and asked

him needless questions, with the hope of thereby establishing some acquaintanceship; but, although he answered them with mildness and courtesy, it was yet in so reserved a manner, that they at last entirely abstained from attempting to disturb the thoughtfulness of his melancholy.

CHAP. III.

SEVERAL years elapsed before I again fell in with Mr. Oakdale. I was then no longer an attended child but a careless boy, allowed to range alone in the freedom of the hills and shores. It was during the summer of the year in which I was first sent to school, perhaps it was later in the season; for a vague assemblage of autumnal circumstances, yellow fields, and ripened berries, are mingled with the remembrance.

I was returning homeward along the brow of the cliffs which overhung his cottage; a sunny breeze was blowing from the sea; and a slight haziness in the air rather whitened than obscured the azure of the heavens. The waves were breaking on the shore, but neither hoarsely nor heavily; and the hissing of the

grass and the rustling of the leaves had more of life than of sadness in their sounds.

Immediately above the cottage was a path which meandered down among the rocks towards the hamlet; and as it shortened my distance from home I turned into it, and had descended about fifty yards, when I discovered him sitting on a rock with his chin resting on his hand. I knew him again at the first glance, so vividly had his image been impressed upon my young remembrance; and I felt as if I had known him in a previous state of existence, which had long, long ceased to be.

I looked at him for a moment, and then softly turned to retrace my steps; but he heard me, and raising himself from the ruminating posture in which he was sitting, he beckoned to me, and invited me with such encouraging accents to come to him, that in the ready confidence of boyhood I soon obeyed the summons.

At first he spoke playfully, as the gentle-hearted ever address themselves to children; but all at once he gazed at me with a wild and startled eye, and brushing up the curls from my forehead with his hand, perused my features with an alarming earnestness, and suddenly burst into tears.

When this paroxysm of incomprehensible sorrow had subsided, he tried to regain my confidence by those familiar civilities which so soon allay the fears and appease the anxieties of the young heart. Still there was a cast of grief and passion in his countenance, and ever and anon he fell into momentary fits of abstraction, during which, his tears, though with less violence, flowed again.

He enquired my name, but it was one of which he had never heard; and he questioned me about many things, but I was ignorant of them all. More than once he regarded me with a look so fierce and suspicious, that it

made me quake, and I was fain to flee from him, but he held me firmly by the wrist. Nevertheless, in the midst of all that wayward and fantastical treatment, there was much gentleness; and I enjoyed on my heart the occasional breathings of a spirit framed of the kindliest elements, and rich in the softest affections of pity, and charity, and love.

CHAP. IV.

I REMAINED with him a long time. It was not indeed until the lighthouse and the evening star were mingling their beams on the glittering waters, that I thought of returning home.

He walked with me to the gate where Mrs. Ormond was standing, alarmed at my absence, and anxiously looking for the servants whom she had sent out in quest of me.

The old lady, on seeing us, came eagerly forward, and while affectionately embracing me, began to chide at my having staid abroad to so late an hour. I had then hold of Mr. Oakdale by the finger, and felt him start at the first sound of her voice: in the same moment he snatched his hand away, and hastily withdrew.

Surprised by his abruptness, Mrs. Ormond raised herself from the posture into which she had stooped to caress me, and enquired with emotion who the stranger was. Before I had time to answer, he returned with a wild and strange haste, and seizing her by the hand endeavoured to remove her to a distance from me.

She demanded to know why he treated her so rudely. He said something in an emphatic whisper which I did not overhear, but it stunned her for an instant; and when she recovered, instead of making him any reply, she led me away, and without speaking closed the gate.

As we ascended the steps of the hall-door I looked back and saw Mr. Oakdale standing on the spot where we had left him. Mrs. Ormond also looked back, and said with an accent which the echoes of memory have never ceased to repeat, "Miserable, miserable man!" She then hurried me before her into the par-

lour, and sunk down upon a sopha, overwhelmed with agitation and grief.

The servants having returned, she enquired if the gentleman who brought me home was still at the gate, but none of them had seen him.

Being by this time somewhat composed, she began to question me again concerning him.

Though I told her all I knew, and that he was the same person whom we had seen so long before sitting forlornly on the rock, still my information appeared to afford no satisfaction, but only to call forth her wonder that he should have been so long so near us, and all the time so perfectly unknown;—by which, young as I then was, and incapable of penetrating the mystery with which I was surrounded, I yet, nevertheless, could discern that I was doomed to experience some ill-omened sympathy with the disastrous fate and fortunes of that unhappy, solitary man.

CHAP. V.

Some feel that their consciousness of life is in their recollections, others enjoy it in their anticipations. I am of those whose sense of being is derived from the past.

Were the ever-forward-going mind a thing to be spoken of as having form and lineament, I should say, that the eyes of mine were in the back of the brain. Of what may be it never reasons, but only doats, with the constancy of fascination, on pictures in the gallery of memory, which it would be happiness to know were but lunacies of the imagination, conceived in some eclipse, and coloured with the unblest shadowings of the full moon. But wherefore speak of what I am? My task is to describe things seen, felt, and known: by these it shall be discovered what I was.

Next morning one of the servants learnt from some of the fishermen that the stranger, as Mr. Oakdale was called among them, had left the widow's cottage, and was gone no one knew whither; but he had presented her with money enough to make her rich for all the remainder of her life.

I was present when these tidings were told to Mrs. Ormond, and they did not allay the anxiety with which she was visibly affected from the event of the preceding evening. For some time she remained silent and thoughtful. I was busy with my toys; but I recollect, as it were a thing of present occurrence, that I now and then stole a glance at her countenance, while I thought of the kind and wayward gentleman of the rock.

She rose, and, opening her writing-desk, began a letter. — I observed as she wrote that she often sighed, and sometimes wiped her eyes. When it was finished a servant was

dispatched on horseback with it, and returned with a post-chaise from Bevlington. In the mean time there was a great bustle in the house by the maids passing to and fro with articles of dress in their hands: the clothes I wore were changed for my holyday suit.

Mrs. Ormond lifted me into the chaise, and placed herself by my side. — I was delighted with the prospect of a jaunt; and when the carriage began to move, and I beheld the objects without, seemingly passing by, it reminded me of my first journey, and brought all the impressive incidents of that eventful day again distinctly before me.

I spoke of them to Mrs. Ormond as of things I had seen in a dream: at first, she gave little heed to my young prattling, for her attention was engrossed with her own thoughts; but as from time to time some new circumstance was recalled, she gradually listened to me with more and more curiosity,

till at last I perceived she was touched with amazement and alarm. Once or twice, she strangely, as it then seemed to me, enquired, if the gentleman of the rock had not described the things of which I was speaking; and she tried to persuade me that I had indeed dreamt them. But her endeavours produced an opposite effect; for they led me to trace so many incidents back from the time in which we were then together, that the illusion melted entirely away, till, mere child as I was, I could not but believe, that what I had at first described as a dream, was the memorial aliment on which my spirit had been long and secretly nourished. It is true, I could not divest them of the vague and visionary character which the recollections of childhood ever possess; but that early controversy gave them the distinctness of a renewed impression, and blended them with feelings which, even at the

tender age of little more than six years, taught me to know, that I had sustained some great misfortune, and was perhaps the heir of guilt and contrition.

CHAP. VI.

WHY are we so averse to confess to one another, how much we in secret acknowledge to ourselves, that we believe the mind to be endowed with other faculties of perception than those of the corporeal senses? We deride with worldly laughter the fine enthusiasm of the conscious spirit that gives heed and credence to the metaphorical intimations of prophetic reverie, and we condemn as superstition, the faith which consults the omens and oracles of dreams; and yet, who is it that has not in the inscrutable abysses of his own bosom an awful worshipper, bowing the head and covering the countenance, as the dark harbingers of destiny, like the mute and slow precursors of

the hearse marshal the advent of a coming woe?

It may be that the soul never sleeps, and what we call dreams, are but the endeavours which it makes, during the trance of the senses, to reason by the ideas of things associated with the forms and qualities of those whereof it then thinks. Are not indeed the visions of our impressive dreams often but the metaphors with which the eloquence of the poet would invest the cares and anxieties of our waking circumstances and rational fears? But still the spirit sometimes receives marvellous warnings; and have we not experienced an unaccountable persuasion, that something of good or of evil follows the visits of certain persons, who, when the thing comes to pass, are found to have had neither affinity with the circumstances, nor influence on the event? The hand of the horologe indexes the movements

of the planetary universe; but where is the reciprocal enginery between them?

These reflections, into which I am perhaps too prone to fall, partake somewhat of distemperature and disease, but they are not therefore the less deserving of solemn consideration. — The hectical flush, the palsied hand, and the frenzy of delirium, are as valid, and as efficacious in nature, to the fulfilment of providential intents, as the glow of health, the masculine arm, and the sober inductions of philosophy. — Nor is it wise in considering the state and frame of man to overlook how much the universal element of disease affects the evolutions of fortune. Madness often babbles truths which make wisdom wonder.

I have fallen into these thoughts by the remembrance of the emotions with which I was affected during the journey with Mrs. Ormond. During that journey, I first

experienced the foretaste of misfortune, and heard, as it were afar off, the groaning wheels of an unknown retribution coming heavily towards me.

CHAP. VII.

When we had travelled about half-a-dozen miles, we entered one of the great highways of the kingdom, and soon after came to an inn, where we changed horses. Our next halt was in a village, through which I must have passed when first taken to be placed under the care of Mrs. Ormond; for a yew-tree on the green, cut into the shape of a lion, reminded me of having been there before; and I directed the attention of Mrs. Ormond towards it, as a proof that the things which I had been relating were historical, and not, as she would have persuaded me to think, but fantastical and imaginary.

She was evidently grieved that my recollection retained such an exact impression of circumstances which, it was hoped, I had

been too young to remember; and she expressed herself with so much sadness at the discovery that it caused me to sit in silence and reverie during the remainder of our journey.

Having again changed horses we continued our progress, and in the afternoon reached the stately portal of a great mansion, situated in the centre of a magnificent park; but all around wore the aspect of neglect and decay. — When we entered the hall Mrs. Ormond exclaimed that the smell of the damp was as the breath of a sepulchre.

Some preparations had been made for our reception. An old domestic, one of three or four who had charge of the house, conducted us to a parlour, in which a fire had been recently lighted, and a table was already covered. A repast was soon after served up, and I gathered from a conversation between Mrs. Ormond and an aged matron, the house-

keeper, that we were to abide with her until answers were received from London to letters which had been sent off that morning.

I rejoiced at this; for in coming up the avenue I had seen many hares playing on the lawn, and was gladdened with the expectation of being permitted to chase them. Accordingly, while Mrs. Ormond continued in conversation with the housekeeper, I left her for that purpose.

In seeking my way alone back to the vestibule, I happened to enter a large saloon, adorned with pictures and mirrors of a princely magnitude. Finding myself in error, I was on the point of retiring, when my eye caught a marble table, on which stood a French clock between two gilded cupids. The supporters of the table were curiously carved into such chimerical forms as belong only to heraldry and romance.

As I looked around at the splendid furniture with wonder and curiosity, something in the ornaments of that gorgeous table arrested my attention, and made a chilly fear vibrate through my whole frame. I trembled as if a spectre of the past had been before me, claiming the renovation of an intimacy and communion which we had held together in some pre-Adamite state of being. Every object in that chamber I had assuredly seen in another time; but the reminiscence which the sight of them recalled fluttered my innocent imagination with fear.

A door, opposite to that by which I had entered, led to the foot of a painted marble staircase. I moved tremblingly towards it, filled with an unknown apprehension and awe. I could no longer doubt I was in the same house where, in infancy, I had witnessed such dismay and sorrow; but all was dim and vague; much of the record was

faded, and its import could not be read. The talisman of memory was shattered, and but distorted lineaments could be seen of the solemn geni who, in that moment, rose at the summons of the charm, and showed me the distracted lady and the wounded gentleman, whose blood still stained the alabaster purity of the pavement on which I was again standing.

CHAP. VIII.

We must have remained at Beechendale-Hall about a month; for I remember, on being placed in bed, I happened to notice the new moon shining dimly opposite the window, and bade Mrs. Ormond, who, according to her custom, was attending to hear that I said my prayers, look how like it was to a ring, — a broken wedding-ring.

How such a thought came into my childish fancy would be useless to conjecture, but the simile so affected her, that she said with a sigh, "Heaven have compassion on this singular boy!" and bending over me, she kissed my forehead, and I felt a tear fall upon my cheek.

I say, we must have remained at Beechendale-Hall at least a month, for I well recol-

lect the waxing of that moon to the full, and the shadows which she threw of the trees on the lawn, fluctuating like the dark waters of little pools and lakes, as the branches were stirred by the wind. Often did I stand admiring from the windows the silvery appearance of the deer in the moonshine, with their horns tipped with glimpses of glittering light, as they moved on their pasture, single or in troops, leaving a wake behind in the dewy grass, like the tracts of ships on the rippling ocean.

On the evening when Dr. Bosville arrived to take me to his school, the new moon was come again. It was first observed by the housekeeper, who was standing with me on the steps of the portico, looking at the heavens as they were lighted up, till I became almost persuaded that I saw the angels of the signs and the seasons busily moving to and fro, kindling the stars, one

by one, with their links and cressets of glory. Mrs. Ormond came to us at the moment, and the housekeeper remarked to her that it was an ominous moon, and betokened grief to the mariner's hearth, so plainly was the corpse of the last seen in its bosom.

What had passed elsewhere, in the mean time, concerning me, was as much beyond the penetration of my young conjecture as the mysteries of destiny. But the first cycle of my life was completed. I had been brought back to the point at which the earliest movements of my retrospective being commenced.

With Dr. Bosville I bade the kind and benignant Mrs. Ormond farewell. She wept bitterly as she pressed me fondly to her heart for the last time; and I was reluctantly lifted from her embrace, and placed in the carriage beside my judicious but austere preceptor.

"You will have many playfellows," said the Doctor, to cheer and encourage me as we

drove away from the house; but I scarcely knew what the word signified, and sat silently ruminating about that which is ever uppermost in the thoughts of the simple child and the inquisitive philosopher — What am I! wherefore are all these things, whither am I going, and who awaits to love or to hate me there?

END OF EPOCH I.

in the silence of dread, acknowledges a tremendous sense of some spirit-seen apocalypse. The world may affect not to understand the mystery; but even the atheistical votary of mathematical truth, will confess at the shrine of some UNKNOWN POWER of nature, that he himself is indeed a sincere and appalled worshipper of a God and Providence, whose place, faculties, and qualities, are as much hidden from the discernment of philosophy as the heavens, the powers, and the purposes of the Being which religion has revealed.

CHAP. II.

Dr. Bosville's school was what is called a select seminary: — he received but ten pupils, the unacknowledged offspring of splendid misery, or the children of parents who had some sad tragedy of the hearth to conceal.

It was to me, however, a noisy, busy, overreaching world. Hitherto I had been a solitary child, cherished with the unwearied caresses of the most affectionate of women, and charmed into the trances of enthusiasm by the blandishments of the summer sunshine, the music of the winds of autumn, the hallelujahs of the winter storm, and the mighty chorus of the ocean waves.

Never was simple boy less prepared for a scene so new, so harsh, so full of discords to all his gentle feelings. I was overwhelmed,

and shrunk from the rude fellowship of my blithe and boisterous companions. I could take no part in their pastimes; but while they were at play in the neighbouring churchyard, I sat on a tomb-stone, and marvelled with myself what partial blessing of gaiety had been bestowed upon them, that I was not permitted to share!

In this mood I continued about two years, shunning but not shunned, for, when the first two or three weeks were over, during which my school-mates had often tried both to vex and to win me from my moping, they desisted, and gradually began to treat me with compassionate affection. They invited me to see the nests they had discovered; they presented me with the best fish which they caught, and one of them, who had received a little dog from some of his friends, came with two of the elder boys, and begged me to accept it. "He will keep you from being alone," said the

generous boys, "and, perhaps, as you do not like our games, he will amuse you with his tricks."

But at the end of the second year a change was produced in the monotony of my reflections, by the removal of one of our companions, and the arrival of another in his place.

Alfred Sydenham was about my own age. The moment we saw one another we both felt that we had been destined to become friends, — and yet it is difficult to imagine how any two children could have been more differently bred. He had just lost his mother, the splendid and beautiful mistress of a nobleman of the very highest rank: but although he was not permitted to bear his father's name, he was yet regarded by him with all the love and kindness which the parental heart can bestow on an only and a darling child. Nor was he unworthy of that affec-

tion which delighted to lavish upon him every indulgence.

It is impossible to imagine a creature more elegantly formed than Sydenham was in his boyhood. His dreadful wounds, and the loss of both his arms at the siege of V********, were not sufficient to destroy the extraordinary gracefulness of his maturer years; — but all his personal endowments were as the anatomy of the frame to the beauty of living youth compared with the delightful felicity of his temper, and the mild yet joyous elements of a spirit which was too noble and generous for the business of life, too sensitive to bear the rubs of adversity. His father died suddenly, without having properly secured the provision he had intended to make for him. Litigation, in an endeavour to establish his claim with the heir, exhausted his means; — he had no resources, for he had lost his hands, and therefore he — died.

CHAP. III.

THE arrival of Sydenham was indeed to me an era. Before that event my feelings were all loose and objectless; I longed for something that I could be kind to, and I felt and believed myself to be a forlorn and unaffiliated thing.

He awoke the sympathy of fraternal affection, which, till then, had been asleep in my bosom: all the premature anxieties of my orphan state were diminished, by being shared in confidence with him; and by the emulation to equal him in our tasks, he gave me the first taste of the pleasure of being in earnest.

He regularly spent the holydays with his father, and it happened, in the course of the summer of the third year after he came to

Dr. Bosville's, that he brought me an invitation from the Duke to accompany him, at Christmas, to B—— Castle. We were then both but in our twelfth year; the circumstances, however, in which we had been respectively placed had taught us to observe with a spirit of more maturity.

The old magnificence of the castle, a rude and vast pile, interested me for the two first days.

It stands on the verge of a precipice, which overshadows a smooth-flowing river. Masses of venerable trees surround it on the other three sides, from the midst of which huge towers, with their coronals of battlements, and clokes of ivy, look down upon the green and bowery villagery of the valley, with the dark aspect of necromancy, and the veteran scowl of obdurate renown. It is indeed a place full of poesy and romance. The mysterious stairs, and the long hazy galleries, are

haunted by the ever-whispering spirits of echo and silence; and the portraits and tapestries of the chambers make chivalry come again.

The arrival of visitors, and the stir of the numerous servants, would soon have changed the solemn mood and legendary cast of my reflections, had I not discovered, in the person of one of the guests, that undivulged stranger of the rock, Mr. Oakdale.

Six years had so altered my appearance, that he did not recognise me, though, I remarked, when he first observed me, that something like a sudden reminiscence moved him for a moment: it, however, passed away; and, during the remainder of his visit, he took no particular notice of me.

I knew him again at the first sight; and, having made Sydenham acquainted with the discovery, we resolved to search, by all possible means, into the secrets of his story.

He had still the same pale and thoughtful countenance which had first attracted my attention, but there was now an air of ease and worldliness about him, that I had not observed before, perhaps the impassioned state of his mind, during his solitary sequestrations from society, had affected the habitude of his manners at that time.

But although both Sydenham and myself were all eye and ear to every thing which related to Mr. Oakdale, he was yet several days in the castle before any thing occurred to afford the slightest clue to the gratification of our intense curiosity. — At last, one day when, according to custom, we were summoned after dinner to partake of the dessert, Sydenham chanced to overhear him say with reference to some public circumstance which Mr. Oakdale did not well recollect, that it must have happened while he was abroad.

"How long is it," said Sydenham, "since you were abroad?"

"About seven-years," was the answer. I heard the reply, and I observed that it attracted general notice.

"In what country were you?" subjoined the ingenious boy.

The question made Mr. Oakdale change colour; and Sydenham, without waiting for an answer, added, eagerly, "And what made you go abroad?"

The Duke, who overheard what was passing, hastily called the young inquisitor away, but not until he had inflicted, as I could plainly discern, a touch of torment on the penitent.

CHAP. IV.

TREMENDOUS and impenetrable destiny, wherefore is it that I have ever been doomed to despondency, like a blighted plant that languishes beneath the frown of an eclipse? Come not all things to pass as Providence hath pre-ordained they should be? What then does it avail to the agency of fate-fettered man that he has faith in the warning of oracles, the science of the augur, or the vision of the prophet, when all things that shall be are already registered in the eternal chronicles of Heaven as past and done?

But these thoughts come too often and too fast upon me. I must endeavour to master them, else shall I never be able to complete my little story with the brevity that be-

fits a tale of a single feeling. Bear, however, with me; for it is my comfortless instinct to observe how it hath pleased Providence to make the falsest promises of fortune ever appear the fairest. What are we all, indeed, but simple victims, pleased with the wreaths by which we are led forward to sacrifice!

I thought that Sydenham was given to me as an indemnity for the companionless melancholy of my orphan childhood, — but he was fated only to widen the horizon of the desert, like the Arabian guide who conducts the traveller to view the skeletons of Palmyra, and abandons him in the midst of the desolation and the waste. — But enough of this, let me proceed.

The Duke having whispered to Sydenham that he wished to see him in his closet in the morning, we soon after left the dining-room together, and, retiring to the apartment allot-

ted to us, we compared our observations. Young as we still were, we both came to the same conclusion, — some bad thing had happened to Mr. Oakdale, which he and his friends desired to forget and should be forgotten.

Is it credible that from that night Sydenham and myself, though we lived long together, and, to the eyes of all who knew us, were companions of singular constancy, — should yet for years have never held any communion as friends?

A spell was invoked upon his frankness; and while he appeared in no measure less attached, yea, even while he showed a deeper feeling of affection for me, (for I often caught him looking at me with pity, till his eye overflowed,) it was but too evident that he stood in awe of my unhappy destiny, and beheld the spectre which ever followed

me, — the undivulged horror, of which my conscious spirit had only the dim knowledge, that dread and bodements sometimes so wonderfully and so inexplicably give.

CHAP. V.

NEXT morning Sydenham and I met as usual in the park. I had been abroad before him, for the little incident of the preceding evening had affected me with a painful curiosity. I had no rest; or if at times Sleep for a moment did alight on my eyelids, it was suddenly scared away by fearful dreams, — the brood of fancy and of memory, — diseased, hideous, and sorrowful.

Nor was the aspect of the morning when I rose of a kind to allay my unhappy mood. Even for the season it was dismal, and a preternatural gloom made the dawn more awful than the night. There was a silence all around such as my spirit had never before felt. A severe frost had hushed the murmuring of the river; the wind was still, and the

woods, incrusted with icicles, were also dumb. The cold had made every stirring thing cower within its nest or lair, and the air, and the fields, and the boughs, were mute and forsaken. Nothing living was seen, no sound heard; and when I looked out at the castle gate and saw the shrubs on the lawn standing in the dim haze of the twilight, all in winding-sheets of hoar-frost, they seemed like monuments in a church-yard, and reminded me of the dead and of sepulchres and spectres!

Thus it happened that Sydenham found me full of superstitious sadness. With his wonted kindness, and with that pleasing gaiety, the delightful quality of his unrivalled and invincible temper, he endeavoured to cheer me, but the topic he chose was calculated to produce a far different effect. He spoke triumphantly of the impression he had produced on Mr. Oakdale, and assured me that

we could not fail soon to discover the secrets of his story. I was persuaded that those secrets were fraught with evil and woe to me.

Our conversation lasted till the breakfast-bell summoned us in, and nothing farther occurred at that time. After breakfast, according to the appointment, he went to his father, who had not made his appearance that morning. He remained with the Duke, it might be about an hour. I know not how it was that this incident should have in any degree interested me, but it did so, and I longed impatiently, and with some degree of fear, for his return.

At last he came, and the moment I saw him I perceived he was no longer the same free, open-hearted companion to me that he had been. His countenance showed he had been told of something which had moved his wonder and sorrow. He, however, came towards me, and I advanced to

meet him, but suddenly he turned round and ran away. All the remainder of the day he kept aloof from me; and I remarked in the evening, when, as usual, we were called in to the dessert, that he twice or thrice looked at Mr. Oakdale with a strange earnestness, and a shudder, as it were, of aversion.

When we retired to our own room, he forgot himself for a moment, and in playfulness laid his hands upon my shoulders, as we were going along the gallery, as if with the intention to leap upon my back; but in the very act he halted, and, thoughtfully, yet with much kindness, said that he was going to his own bed-chamber to read, and immediately retired; I, too, went to mine, but neither to read nor to find repose.

CHAP. VI.

NEXT morning a letter was brought to me from Dr. Bosville, by a gentleman, who, as the Doctor informed me, was appointed to conduct me to Eton.

Towards Dr. Bosville I had never felt any degree of attachment. His manners were naturally cold and reserved, and his professional duties had given him a habit of methodical austerity repulsive to youth. But the stream often runs pure and strong beneath the ice. His letter was full of parental tenderness, and contained compassionate expressions, which could only have been dictated by some knowledge of the evil impending in my fate. Among other regrets, he lamented that he had been obliged to part with me so prematurely and so suddenly; — a circumstance

which led me to imagine that the unknown ruler of my destiny was moved to the order by something in the accident of my visit to B—— Castle, and the estrangement of Sydenham confirmed me in that opinion.

The Duke kindly entreated my conductor to allow me to stay out the holydays, and urged him to remain with me; but his instructions were so peremptory, that I was not permitted to stop even another day.

I do not recollect the name of that gentleman, nor is it of any consequence I should. He was a boisterous and offensive person, crimsoned in the face with irascibility and intemperance. He had been in the army, and was a major.

On alighting at the gate of the College, an officer, belonging to a regiment of the Guards, then quartered in Windsor, came up and shook hands with him, and I gathered, with greedy ears, from their conversation, that it

was at the request of an old General, a mutual friend of both, he had become, as he termed it, bear-leader, for the day, of me. Had the name of the General then been mentioned, or had I not been withheld by remorseless and incomprehensible Fate from asking it, what sorrow, what misery, what guilt, had been averted!

But it comes of the structure of man to forget that the worm, he was created to be food to, may be of higher consequence in the scheme of the universe than he who hath proclaimed himself the paragon of animals, and the glory of the earth! In the dream of his imagined dignity, he looks for omens and prodigies to warn him of the woes which in this world he was born to suffer. Yet what are portents but the signs of things that have been—funereal pageantry! Nature and destiny execute their greatest purposes by invisible engines. The pestilence travels in darkness —

wars are often begotten of the undetermined maladies of minions or of ministers. The element of fire is viewless in the combustible — a pebble hath turned the roaring waters of a mighty flood — Death is silent, and Omnipotence on all His universal thrones is alike unsearchable and unseen.

How is it that we never think of applying this stupendous demonstration to the circumstances of man, constantly admonished as we are, that the turns of fortune are produced by trifles, whose seeming insignificance in occurrence alone causes them to be disregarded. The germ is implanted in the past — the rich soil of the cemetery of the past — and often slow is the growth of that tree which at last overshadows the present, and scatters its baleful seedlings far into the regions of hereafter.

CHAP. VII.

UPWARDS of six years had elapsed since I was consigned by Mrs. Ormond to the care of Dr. Bosville, and I was still as ignorant of the world as when I parted from her maternal bosom. Some of the jealousies and petty frauds of school-boys I had, in the meantime, — shall I say — acquired? No, I had but learnt that such things were. — In all that long meantime of more than six years, the remembrance of her kindness had continued, wrapped in many a fold of my softest feelings, and often in my ruminations have I longed to see her again, and wondered if I ever should.

The Major, after introducing me to Doctor ——— at Eton, to whose care I was particularly recommended, carried me to dine at

an inn in Windsor. On reaching the house, he went into the coffee-room, and ordered dinner, and while it was preparing took me with him to walk on the terrace.

The evening was cold and raw, a foggy and foul easterly wind blew in gusts, and filled the wide prospect with untimely obscurity. The sentinels stood shivering in their boxes, and we were fain to return earlier than the Major had intended.

All the time from our departure in the morning from B—— Castle, he had but seldom spoken to me. He was evidently discontented with his office. It was a task which must have been forced upon him; for he grudged the performance as if it had been tainted with something of shame.

Two or three times I was struck with his shyness, and particularly so by the emotion and the manner with which he shrunk back on observing a carriage passing across the

bottom of the street as we returned from the Castle. He stopped suddenly, and with a rude expression and an angry snatch, seized me by the arm, and pulled me abruptly into a shop, where we remained several minutes in frivolous conversation with the young man who kept it.

As we left the shop, he looked warily and anxiously around, and then hurried with precipitation towards the inn, bidding me in his roughest manner follow him quickly. I was doing so, when in turning the corner of the Town-hall, I happened to observe two ladies at the balcony windows of the inn. One of them was much younger than the other, and her air and dress were elegant and fashionable, but it was the elder that arrested my eyes, for I discovered in her my dear and excellent Mrs. Ormond.

I knew her at once; she wore, as usual, a black lace-cap over one of white cambric;

she had also on the same sort of black silk mittens I had been accustomed to see her wear, and she possessed the same pale and benign countenance.

I stopped for a moment to look at her, in the hope she would notice and recollect me; but the Major, who had by this time entered the inn-door, turned round and chided me for lingering.

The harshness of that man's behaviour had wounded my morbid delicacy; and though I was burning with impatience to throw myself into the arms of my venerable friend, I had yet no power left to tell him what I wished, nor to do what I so earnestly desired!—I recollect it as an instance of his heartlessness, that instead of going with me to Eton, he ordered the porter of the inn to take me home, while he continued at his wine.

In the morning I rose betimes, and hastened to the inn, in the hope of finding Mrs.

Ormond still there, — but she was gone. She and the other lady had returned to London the preceding evening, and the Major had accompanied them in their carriage.

CHAP. VIII.

WELL do I remember with what feelings of disappointment and of grief, chastened with wonder, I returned to Eton. I could not but connect the appearance of Mrs. Ormond in Windsor, at that particular time, with some undivulged occurrence in my fate. Her acquaintance with the Major, — his anxiety to avoid observation, — the elegant unknown lady, — were all so many ingredients in the spell of mystery by which I was withheld from participating in the common sympathies and enjoyments of my age.

But though these reflections saddened my spirit at the time, they yet generated a motive which gave new energy to my character. I was certain, by what I had observed, that I belonged to the upper ranks of society; and

this notion, with the dim reminiscence of my childhood, lent a colouring of probability, to a suspicion which I began to entertain, that whatever of guilt or of grief was in the fortunes of my family had originated with my mother.

During the quiet of the remaining holydays I did nothing but ruminate on this suspicion. Had I been asked, in the course of that time, whether I had noticed the appearance of Windsor Castle, I verily think I must have answered in the negative, so entirely were my thoughts engrossed with my unhappy egoism. But as the other boys came back to College this dejection wore away, and I gradually became a very different creature to what I had ever before been. Without being less reserved than I was at Dr. Bosville's, I entered into more fellowship with my companions, and, without having any desire to be more playful than when I was the shy and bashful orphan

whom my school-mates were wont to treat with so much gentleness, I became a bold and obstreperous adventurer.

This was not altogether involuntary. I saw that I was now among youths by whom I might obtain some clue to lead me out of the labyrinth in which I was so bewildered; but days, and weeks, and months, and years, passed away, and I remained still unsatisfied. As I grew older my allowance from Dr. —— was gradually increased. I was always treated as an heir to fortune, and, when the vegetable period of life was over, I was restrained by no considerations of pecuniary prudence from participating in the dissipation of my companions.

In this way time passed till I was about seventeen, when Dr. —— informed me, that he was instructed to send me to Oxford. The intelligence was received as good news and glad tidings. I felt that but one step

more, and I should be in the world, free to act for myself, and free to embark in any enterprise by which I could hope to discover the secret so carefully and so intricately concealed.

But my joy was somewhat chilled and shaded when the Doctor told me, that a gentleman was appointed to call for me at Eton, in order to carry me to Oxford. I recollected the Major; and the remembrance of his forbidding manners made me fear it might be him. I was, however, agreeably disappointed.

CHAP. IX.

It was the Rev. Mr. Alsager who came for me; and I soon discovered that he knew nothing whatever either of my previous history or of those occult circumstances in which I was so much interested. Through the medium of some friend he had been appointed to attend me, and, as his allowance was liberal, he treated me with indulgent consideration. More of me than my name he knew not; but, nevertheless, his mild and agreeable deportment soon made me regard him as a friend, and the wisdom of his gentle admonition was a rein and curb upon the extravagance of the career I was beginning at Eton.

To the worth and virtues of this excellent man I am indebted beyond all comput-

ation. Whatever of approbation or of favour I afterwards acquired in the world I owe to his admirable discretion, and to the calm and beautiful address with which he won me from error, and taught me the way which leads to happiness and honor. — Alas! I had inherited an ancestral curse, and was not to be excepted from the avenging menace in the Decalogue.

Soon after our arrival at Oxford, I met Sydenham in the street: he had just arrived, and was also entered a gentleman-commoner of the same college. We were both greatly delighted at seeing each other again, and for some time we could not sufficiently congratulate ourselves in being brought so happily together.

But when I reminded him of the circumstances in which we had been separated, a cloud darkened his countenance, and from that moment I perceived that the effects of his

father's undivulged communication were still uneffaced.

Often have I regarded it as not one of the least remarkable things in the troubled current of my life, that I never, by any chance, for so long a period, was animated with resolution enough to ask Sydenham what he had heard to make him regard me with so much more of pity than belongs to friendship.

It was, however, so; and I am doomed to rue, for a few days more, the consequences of that strange diffidence which the early impressions of crime and of sorrow, — the crime and the sorrow of others, — had awakened or implanted in my bosom.

But notwithstanding the unexplained reserve of Sydenham we continued always friends; it would be more correct, however, to say companions; for the withholding of that something by which I was to be so

much affected, deprived our intimacy of all the cordiality and confidence which belongs to friendship, and in which we were respectively formed by nature to have indulged.

The allowance from his father was as unbounded as the Duke's affection; but, unfortunately, His Grace was irregular in his remittances, and I was often obliged to become Sydenham's banker: this, too, had its effect in weakening the tie between us. He felt himself reduced below the level of a friend by accepting my assistance. I will not wrong my own nature to say that the granting of it either diminished my regard for him, or impaired the equality, I might even say the admiration, with which I never ceased to regard his many delightful and noble qualities.

But every thing around me, and with which I became connected, was fated to partake of the disastrous taint of my inheritance. What

nature seemed to have made on purpose to contribute to my happiness, was, by the impoisoned influence of parental sin, turned into a source of anguish and of mortification.

The burning marl was prepared for the unblest foot; and it has been my doom to taste but of bitterness in that cup, wherein all which can gladden and embolden youth was mingled and administered by health and opulence.

CHAP. X.

In one of my occasional excursions with Sydenham to London, we happened to go to Drury-Lane theatre when Hamlet was performing. I had heard of Shakspeare, as most University-men commonly do. I was prepared to admire his genius, without having the most remote idea of his merits or of his power. I am not conscious of having read one line of his works, nor do I believe that I had either seen or desired to see before, any one of his plays in representation.

But the opening of Hamlet is pitched to a key with which I was almost constantly in unison. Of the story I had never heard, though the name of the hero was as familiar to me as to most unbookish students.

As the performance proceeded, I soon felt that the tale it told was shadowed in the conception I had formed of the circumstances of my own fortunes.

The cunning of the scene at one time so overcame me, that I laid hold of Sydenham by the arm, and breathed with such trepidation, that he enquired in alarm if I was unwell. This was when the ghost related in what manner he had been murdered. From that moment I looked forward to see Hamlet in the character of an avenger, —terrific, magnificent, and resolved: but when I saw him so soon after become a puling and purposeless misanthrope, I was, for a time, discontented with the whole piece. There was, however, so much of philosophical ingenuity in the plot and stratagem of the players' play, that my attention was again arrested, and I watched with an ardour and earnestness for the result, equal almost to

what the Prince of Denmark himself might have felt. At the moment when Hamlet is satisfied of his uncle's guilt, I started from my seat, and the first object that caught my eye was Mr. Oakdale in the adjoining box, startled by my emotion.

He looked at me for an instant with the unrecognising eye of a stranger; he evidently did not then recollect me; but when I had resumed my seat, and he had looked again towards the stage for about the space of a minute, he suddenly threw his eyes towards me, as with apprehension and dread. My agitation at that moment was too great to give utterance to my feelings. I rose and hurried from the box, followed by Sydenham, who, alarmed at my extravagance, came with me out of the theatre.

I said nothing. As we moved on, he often entreated me to tell him what was the matter; but there was a flashing of recollections and

imaginations overwhelming my reason; and it was not until we were by ourselves, in a private parlour in one of the neighbouring taverns, that I was in any condition to hear or to answer his questions.

I placed my elbows on the table, and clasped my temples in my hands, remaining in that position silent for some four or five minutes.

"Now, Sydenham," said I at last, "I can believe what I have heard of the genius of Shakspeare."

"Is that all?" said he with a smile, intended, doubtless, to allay the perturbation, which he ascribed to the poetry and the performance; and he added, "I never should have conceived, however, that any thing in so heavy a drama as Hamlet could have moved you to such a degree;" and then he began to descant as a critic on the talents of the author.

What he said, or what he meant to have impressed me with, sounded in my ear unheeded, and I cried abruptly; "Cease, you know nothing of his genius: he has told me to-night what I had before but, as it were, dreamt of."

"Well! what has he told you?"

"That my father has been murdered."

Sydenham grew pale, and lay back in his chair in astonishment.

"Nay more," cried I; "he has told me, that the crime was caused by my mother."

Sydenham trembled and rose from his seat, exclaiming, "Is this possible?"

"Yes, and you have known it for years; and that Mr. Oakdale is the adulterous assassin!"

END OF EPOCH II.

EPOCH III.

CHAP. I.

WHEN Sydenham came to me in the morning, I was calm and collected. "I am glad to see you in that state," said he; "and I hope, before you take any resolution, you will return with me to Oxford. Many years have now elapsed since the event took place, and neither of us have any friend with whom we can consult on a subject of such delicacy."

"Rely upon it," replied I, "this incident has not come to pass as a chance, but as a

cause,—something will follow from it, or some other thing has happened with it that will speak as imperatively to me as the ghost did to Hamlet. These are the things which are not dreamt of in your philosophy; of such substance are the restless spirits that divulge guilt, and the unhouselled spectres that avenge crime. But what you say is just and wise. — Let us return to Oxford."

Little more passed at that time: I was too much occupied with my own cogitations to notice or to think of any other topic than the frightful and humiliating vision which, in a thousand shapes and horrors, filled the whole compass of my imagination.

We arrived at our college, almost, I may say, without having exchanged a word; but on entering my room, I was surprised to see upon my table a note, of which the superscription was in an unknown hand. As I lifted it, glancing at the seal, I said to

Sydenham, "Here is the principal to which the incident of last night was but the herald."

The note was from General Oglethorpe: it was brief, merely stating, that he was unknown to me, but had business of such importance to communicate that he would wait in Oxford till I returned from London.

At that juncture the General was announced, and I immediately went forward to receive him.

His appearance was precise, erect, and professional; his complexion bore the impress of foreign climates, and his thin hair, though covered with powder, was bleached by the influence of other changes than those of age.

Sydenham was about to retire, which the General observing, requested him to remain; and turning to me, said, "Is this the young gentleman of whom I have heard as your particular friend?"

I was struck with the espionage over me which this incidental expression revealed, and said coldly, "It is Mr. Sydenham."

"Then," replied the General, "I have nothing to say here," laying a particular emphasis on the last word, "to which he may not be privy;" and again turning to me, he held out his hand, and with a slight accent of emotion, betraying the sensibility he endeavoured to restrain, he added, "Nephew."

In the surprise of the moment I retreated from him, but instantly recovering my self-possession, I bent forward and seized his profered hand between both of mine with feelings of which it were in vain to attempt any description.

"This," said the General, "is not a fit place to tell you my errand, or to explain the reasons which have occasioned me to make somewhat abruptly this sudden disclosure of our connexion; but the time was fast coming

when it could no longer be delayed. I have therefore come to take you with me for a few days, and I have made arrangements with the Master for your absence. To you the journey cannot be unpleasant, for it is to carry you to a princely inheritance that has long been your own, and I expect you, with the least possible delay, to accompany me to Beechendale Hall."

I remembered the name; the place, and every object around it, had been engraved on my memory, and treasured in my breast, from the time I had resided there with Mrs. Ormond. Sydenham, too, was acquainted with the name, for I had often spoken of the place to him, and he was scarcely less surprised than I was myself.

Nothing more particular then happened. The old General, who was exceedingly formal, but withal courteous, retired to the Star Inn, to give the necessary orders for our depar-

ture, whilst Sydenham remained with me in a state of amazement scarcely less superstitious, as it may be called, than my own. — He said little, but sometimes he lifted the letter and looked at it, and then walked across the room, and asked me, with a degree of earnest anxiety, how I felt.

CHAP. II.

THE old General told his tale in that state of commanded sensibility with which a gentleman endeavours to possess himself, when convinced he cannot but produce irremediable affliction. His communication was indeed calculated to turn the May of hopeful feeling into the sere and yellow of withered disappointment.

My mother's father was his brother, and she was the sole heiress of her maternal ancestors, from whom she inherited the splendid domain of Beechendale, and whose surname I bore — my father was a young gentleman, richer in heraldry than possessions, with whom she accidentally had become acquainted. Her passion for him was rash and prodigal; even before she presented him with her hand, she

made him master of all her inheritance, reserving for herself only a settlement comparatively inconsiderable.

I was the sole offspring of their sudden fondness; but scarcely had I been brought into the world, when her fickle affections withdrew from the husband of her youthful devotion, and clung with the same warmth and recklessness to another object. I do not recollect whether General Oglethorpe said that Mr. Oakdale was the first minion of her infidelity; but from this topic I may retire: over the shame of a parent, filial reverence has ever been permitted to draw a veil.

When my father discovered her intimacy with Mr. Oakdale, that hideous scene ensued, the remembrance of which still hovers in the dreamy reminiscences of my earliest childhood; but he was not killed, only wounded in the scuffle.

Mr. Oakdale fled, and was not for years heard of — it was during that time he inhabited the widow's cottage — my mother also made her escape to the continent.

My father, under the influence of some relic of tenderness for the fond extravagance with which she had lavished her vast fortune upon himself, abstained from instituting any legal proceedings against her. "He was, indeed," said the General, "a gentleman of singular delicacy; and though he recovered from his wound, he yet did not long survive the humiliation of dishonoured affection."

Immediately after the discovery, I was sent to my grandmother; but the event had broken her heart, for it was supposed that my father's wounds were mortal, and he was her only child.

On the death of that venerable lady, I was consigned to the care of Mrs. Ormond, who had been governess to my mother, and who

had never ceased to deplore the errors of her beautiful and favourite pupil; and General Oglethorpe was appointed by my father the special guardian of my education.

"I had thought," said the General, that my niece would not interfere with an arrangement framed with so much kindness towards herself, nor, indeed, till long after your father's death, did she make any attempt even to see you. It happened, however, that one day observing in the newspapers some account of the Christmas festivities at B***** castle, when Mr. Oakdale was there; and knowing, I do not well recollect how, that you were then also at the castle, a sudden instigation of shame and contrition made her, on the instant, order your removal to Eton. Except in that instance, I have never been obliged to exercise the authority with which I was invested; but a proceeding so peremptory on her part called for equal sternness on mine,

and you have ever since been entirely under my controul."

From the manner in which my guardian thus expressed himself, I was led to imagine that it was he who had sent the coarse and unmannerly major to place me at Eton. — On such slender pivots as such imaginings do the influences of fortune often turn.

The secret I had so long thirsted to know being at last disclosed, I enquired eagerly what had become of my mother; but the punctilious veteran refused to tell — he even exacted a promise that I should never seek to discover her.

" She has dishonoured herself and us all," said he proudly; " and it is charity, yea, affection, to regard her as dead."

A reason so imperative who could withstand? Yes; I was doomed to give the promise, — Oh, fatal, fatal pledge! But let my pen here pause, — let this trembling hand

rest for a little while, — let me suspend the record of those things which have filled the untimely twilight of my brief, dull day, more full of terrors than all I dread to meet in the starless night which will so soon close around me, in the silent valley and shadow of death.

CHAP. III.

BEECHENDALE-HALL and park were among the finest in England, but the blood of my father was there in visible stains, and the effects of my mother's guilt no less indelible, had touched every object with the corrosion of desertion and decay.

When General Oglethorpe finished his story, and I had wiped away the tears, which would not be repressed, I rose and walked towards the door of the library in which we had been sitting. He followed me, holding his hat in his hand. We passed into the saloon in silence. I looked around for a moment on the gorgeous furniture, and my eye falling on the rich and curious table with the French clock, I became so agitated by the wild and hurried recollections which the

sight recalled, that I could no longer master myself, but bursting into a paroxysm of inexpressible grief, exclaimed, "General, let this house be demolished; see the work properly done. It is but a monument of guilt, foul with my father's blood! and fouler with my mother's shame!"

The tear stood upon the cheek of the honourable veteran, and without speaking he shook me cordially by the hand, as he covered his face with his hat. The conflict, however, was but for a moment; almost in the same instant he regained his self-possession, and returning back into the saloon, summoned a servant and ordered his carriage to be got immediately ready for our departure.

"We shall go," said he, "to your paternal inheritance. There you will be reminded of no such scenes of dishonour as have happened beneath these gaudy ceilings, and have

sullied this splendour with the tarnish of guilt."

I followed him to the carriage without speaking, and the same evening we reached Throstle-grove, the antique gothic portal of which, the wide low hall, the beetling lintel of the huge chimney, adorned with the family escutcheon, and the parlour beyond with the portraits of knights and warriors in armour, revived all the slumbering recollections of the first adventures of my ill-starred mirthless childhood.

It was a homely but ancestral mansion, full of a sober household dignity, — something of the good olden time every where bore testimony to the heartiness and good cheer of manorial hospitality, and a grave and motherly comfortableness reigned throughout: the old domestics, both in appearance and manners, were becoming to the dwelling.

"This," said I, as we entered the parlour, "this, General, shall be my home — the very air here is sweetened with the remembrance of indescribable kindness. — I feel, as it were, again on the soft lap of affection, and the fingers of venerable love wandering amidst the tangled curls of my infantine hair."

The excellent old man remained with me about a week, during which it was determined I should not return to Oxford, but, as soon as the requisite arrangements could be made, proceed to the continent for a year or two. These occupied several months.

The chain and the fetter were, however, upon me, and despite of resolution and intent, I was dragged to my appointed doom. The coming shadows of inevitable misfortune had always indeed darkened and chilled my spirit, but it was not until left to decide for myself, that I felt how much I was

entangled within the irresistible eddies of the stream of destiny, which, like the wide and shoreless Hellespont of the Atlantic, never knows a returning tide.

CHAP. IV.

On the evening preceding my departure for Harwich, I ordered my groom to have the horses at the door by break of day; but when I rose in the morning, an unwonted depression, beyond the habitual heaviness which ever weighed upon my heart, made me linger and reluctant to depart, and yet the universal aspect of the heavens and the earth was bland and gracious, and the glorious harmonies of the morning and the spring, were eloquent with invocations to happiness and tranquillity.

As the horses were brought to the door, the sun rose over the woods and uplands — a few thin streaks of vapour floating high and beautiful in the great cupola of the world, seemed like praise embodied in incense as-

cending from the altars of early devotion — and the sadness of my spirit began to yield to the delicious influences of a scene so holy and so calm.

Before mounting, I happened to look towards the wall which separated the lawn from the highway — a row of trees and shrubs screened its unsightly appearance, but here and there an opening disclosed a vista of the distant country, and in one of those openings, I observed something seemingly carried on the shoulders of four persons, whose heads only were visible. — It passed and was concealed by the trees, but it had seized my attention, and I followed it with my eye. When it came to the next opening I saw it plainer, and could trace the outlines of a human form covered with a sheet, which, in several places, was stained with blood.

This sight darkened the splendour of the morning, and withered the beauty of the

spring. I instantly lept into my saddle, and clapping spurs to my horse, was soon at a distance from the inauspicious omen.

When I reached the first stage, where I intended to breakfast, I sent my servant forward to the village, but, on alighting, I found the house almost deserted; a little girl and the hostler, an old grey-headed man, were the only persons who made their appearance. Having given my horse to the latter, I desired the girl to get breakfast ready, but she replied it would be necessary to wait till her mistress or some of the other servants came back.

"Where are they," said I, "and when do you expect them?"

"They are all gone to the village — every body is gone to the village. Are not you, too, Sir, going to the village?"

"Yes, I am on my way, but I am going to a far distant country."

I know not how it was that I should have so expressed myself to one so young and simple, but my thoughts were adrift: I was scarcely aware of what I said.

The child looked at me curiously, and I was struck with a remarkable momentary cast in her eyes when she replied as I paused:

"You may go to the village, but you will find no one there who will help you forward to-day."

"Why, — what has happened in the village — why are all the people gone thither this morning?"

"Have you not heard?" said she, in a low apprehensive whisper, looking timidly around, and drawing closer towards me.

I yielded to the sympathy which her manifest dread and awe awakened — as she added, coming nearer and nearer — "They carried it past in the grey of the morning — we

heard a noise, and looked out at the windows. The daylight had not begun to show itself, but it is the last quarter of the moon, — they say it betokens no good when such things chance in the wane of the moon, — and we saw it by her waning light."

"What did you see?"

"There were four," replied the little maiden, with the same emphatic and mystical look which had so particularly attracted my attention — "I saw them black in the moonshine. They were speaking, but I could not discern their voices — I heard only the murmuring of their tongues. As we were looking and listening, the wind came rustling from the trees and lifted aside the shroud."

She shuddered, and graspingly took me by the hand for a moment, unable to describe what the wind had revealed — and then she flew into the house, and bolting the door, would not be entreated to open it.

I immediately called to the hostler to bring back my horse — and I resolved to ride at once to the village. It is singular I should never have thought of questioning the hostler; but the sight I had seen, the apparitional spectacle which the girl described in those few and feature-like touches, and above all, her own spiritual look, absorbed every other idea. It was not until I left the house more than a mile behind, that I began to marvel at my absence in not asking the hostler what had happened.

CHAP. V.

As I approached the village, I met several persons coming from it together, in very earnest and serious conversation. They all turned aside as I rode towards them, evidently shunning me, that they might not be disturbed — and their shyness made me pass them without speaking.

About a furlong, perhaps less, from the entrance to the village, stands a single cottage of an antique and picturesque appearance. The chimnies are curiously formed, and seem as if they had once belonged to some great mansion, but the windows are small and grotesquely ornamented. It is placed within a little garden enclosed on three sides by an ancient wall, covered with fruit-trees and vines; in front of the house the

wall, however, is less than half the height of the other three sides and the space between it and the house is planted with flowers, pansies, and hollyhocks of rank and luxurious vegetation.

As I drew near towards it, a number of children and old women were standing along the outside of the dwarf wall, all looking anxiously and in silence at an aged crone who was busy washing several articles of apparel. An employment so ordinary, to occasion so much wonder and solemnity, made me halt and join them, and a strange phantasy took possession of my imagination; nor was it without reasonable cause, for as the old woman turned over the clothes, broad and gory stains were exposed to view, at the sight of which the spectators uttered a low involuntary murmur of horror.

At that moment two men, carpenters by their appearance and the tools in their hands,

came out of the house bringing with them one of those boards on which country people lay out their dead. As they turned aside to place the board against the wall, I saw it had been recently besmeared with blood, and wiped in so careless a manner, that the marks were still fresh and wet.

I called to one of them and enquired what had happened, but he answered me with coarse and audacious ribaldry; a few words, however, satisfied, or rather appalled, my curiosity, for the story resembled the tragedy of my own home, and I turned from him with humiliation and disgust. But my mind was then elevated and solemn, and the indignation which his licentiousness provoked, filled me with the fanaticism of a sublime anticipation. — I felt, as it were, divine impulses, prompting me to holy enterprises — a light, a halo seemed to be shining around me. I was no less to myself, in the mood

of that impassioned moment, than one chosen and fated to fulfil the part of an avenger. — Alas! I have been but predestined to rue and to endure the miseries of those crimes, which, in the holy enthusiasm of indignant resolution, I had fancied myself commissioned to weed from the world. —

CHAP. VI.

On reaching Harwich, I found the packet clear for sea, and my baggage, which had been sent from Throstle-grove the evening before, was already on board.

For a few minutes, after ascending on deck, the novelty of the scene, the bustle of the sailors, and the haste and hurry of departure, interested me; but the remembrance of the morning's incidents soon regained their influence, and I retired to my cabin, abandoned to the bodements with which I had become infected.

The Captain did not arrive on board till the tide began to ebb. It was then dark; the skies were clouded and lowering, but there was scarcely any wind, and we drifted

more than a mile after weighing anchor, before the breeze had strength enough to make the ship answer to her rudder.

During the din and activity of unmooring, I left my cabin, and, going upon the quarter-deck, leant against the railing, and allowed free scope to the melancholy humour which pervaded my comfortless reflections.

As the vessel was kedged towards the harbour's mouth, the sullen aspect of the heavens grew less menacing; — here and there a star glimmered out between the clouds; — the occasional breathings of the wind upon the sails, and the rippling of the sea against the side of the ship, took also something away from the monotony of night; but yet the change only served to awaken a more dismal train of associations.

The slow funereal motion of the vessel felt as the sensible gliding away of time; the glimmering stars, peeping dimly, and but at

intervals, from beyond the clouds, seemed imperfect witnesses, bearing testimony to the being of another world, and imagination, in the breathing airs and murmuring waters, found some remote accordance to the sighs and regrets heard around the bed of death. This dark and sad enthusiasm was deepened in its feelings by the dawning light of the rising moon; which gave to the obscure outline of the receding land an appearance as fearful and mysterious as if the pall of oblivion had been raised from the corpse of some stupendous Being.

By the time we had reached the open sea, which a breadth and freedom in the motion of the ship soon announced, the moon was several degrees above the horizon: the clouds were become fleecy, and their seams, through which the stars glimmered, unfolded wide and beautiful vistas of the constellations, shining in the holiness of their sublime tran-

quillity. The ocean also was brightened; and the waves, as they moved gently before the breeze, showed their white manes to the moon.

As the ship, with all her canvass spread, held her course before the wind, I retired from the railing against which I had been leaning, and stretched myself on the coops, with my hands beneath my head, looking to the star of the zenith, and giving to the fleecy clouds, as they changed their forms, the lineaments of shrouded spirits in solemn transit from the earth to another world. In this state of superstitious rumination, I beheld a small dense black cloud, on the verge of a hazy mass of vapour, which obscured, but did not entirely conceal the moon. I watched its progress, till I fancied I could discern the dim form of two vast hands bearing that sarcophagus-thing between them.

My blood grew cold, and my flesh began to crawl on my bones as I continued to trace the development of that phenomenon; for at last I distinctly discovered the whole figure to which those mighty hands belonged, and beheld, as it were, the Ancient of days, garmented in shadows: his beard flowing over his breast, with the hoary affluence of priestly antiquity.

Suddenly the casket he held appeared to open; in the same moment a deep, low whisper of dread and wonder rose from all on board the ship.

I started up, shuddering with horror at the hideous portent; and the ship-dog, a black and sullen cur, came running coweringly and terrified towards me. — His eye glanced at the Omen, as if he said to me, "Look!" and, gazing in my face, he began to howl, with fearful pauses between, in which the seamen thought they heard voices afar off,

answering from the clouds and the waves; and they boded no less than of shipwreck to themselves, and a watery winding-sheet to me.

CHAP. VII.

As the breeze freshened, the motion of the vessel increased, till it made the all-absorbing anguish of physical suffering overpower every faculty of my mind—but our passage to Hamburgh was speedy, and to the sailors pleasant. The passengers were landed in the afternoon of the following day.

While I was standing on the wharf after having been put ashore, an English gentleman, with a young lady leaning on his arm, came towards me. Their appearance, and the familiarity between them, showed they were father and daughter.

He possessed a noble military presence; and though somewhat faded from the grace of youth, was still in the lustre of manhood. But why speak of one so well known, and so

universally admired for his personal elegance? It was General Purcel, — need I add, and poor Maria, who, as she hung upon his arm, smiled in his face with those eyes of loveliness that the epicure worm was so soon to make his prey, and those lips, more beautiful and richer with delight than the rosy morning. — Ha! to what am I betrayed?

But unless I describe the feelings, unfelt before, with which I first beheld that exquisite creature — how shall the dreadful issues of our terrific tale be ever rightly understood! Yet, I will restrain my impassioned pen, for it were guilt now to speak of her as my heart prompts.

The General, on approaching, addressed me with an agreeable urbanity. He was waiting with his family for a fair wind to pass over to England. "We have been several years," said he, "on the continent; but my wife has at last become alarmed at

the progress of the French, and the disorganization of society which ensues wherever they come."

He then enquired the latest news. I had nothing, however, particular to report; and, finally, while my servant was getting the baggage ashore, we walked saunteringly towards a carriage, in which Mrs. Purcel was sitting. . . . .

I cannot describe the singular and delightful flutter into which I was thrown by the voice and smile of that lady. I felt as if I could have leaped into her arms, and fondled in her bosom. This ecstasy was, however, but for a moment, for Maria was at my elbow, and the matronly graces of her mother awakened but a momentary feeling of childish joy compared with the glowing sentiment which her smile and beauty had kindled in my bosom. Yes; the emblem of love is fire, and like the element it re-

sembles, when once lighted in two pure and faithful hearts, the mingling flame, increasing as it burns, points to the divine source whence its bright and beauteous element first emanated.

In the mean time, the wind, which had been for some time constantly increasing, began to blow with violence; the clouds thickened, and the squally showers came nearer and nearer.

Mrs. Purcel, while alone in the carriage, had remarked the augmenting symptoms of a storm more than any of the party; and declared she would not embark until the weather assumed a more favourable aspect. After some little domestic altercation, the General consented to return with her to their hotel, which he recommended to me as the best in the city. I required, however, no recommendation to prefer it. It was the residence of Maria, and I was fascinated.

General Purcel having placed his daughter in the carriage beside her mother, politely offered to walk with me, and we proceeded together by its side.

During the course of our walk, and particularly after I had entered their apartment in the hotel, I was several times put out of countenance by the intense earnestness with which Mrs. Purcel occasionally looked at me. She was evidently of a gay disposition, and her manners were singularly elegant and playful; but now and then a shade overcast the brightness of her countenance, and she appeared at times uneasy, impatient, and altogether strangely affected towards me. — I did not, however, much remark this at the time, for Maria was present, and my whole soul was occupied with her.

Having continued with them longer than good manners would have allowed, I thanked the General for his attention and retired.

Scarcely, however, had I quitted their apartment, when I felt myself embarrassed by having neglected to inform them of my name, — if neglect it can be called, — which was the effect of the insurmountable backwardness I ever felt in announcing myself to strangers, lest the history of my mother's errors should be known to them, and thereby recalled to mind. — Still, in the midst of the irksome reflections with which I was affected, I enjoyed moments of a fluttering and unspeakable pleasure. The image of Maria was radiant in my thoughts and wishes, and hopes and anticipations were mingled with the fond contemplation of so delightful a vision. — There was also a charm in the impression I had received of her mother, that saddened while it soothed me, as the moonlight sheds melancholy in the calm of the summer night, when it lightens the silent

shores, and silvers the expanse of the waveless sea. — But the spell of her mother's influence soon passed, and Maria alone dazzled my imagination.

CHAP. VIII.

SURELY it is the very error of our nature, a fantasy of human pride, to suppose that man can be wisely ruled by his reason. Are not all our sympathies and antipathies but the instructions of instinct — the guide which we receive direct, original, and uncorrupted from Heaven?

It may be, that we cannot, like choughs and ravens, and the other irrational and babbling oracles of change — being so removed by habit from the pristine condition of natural feeling — predict from our own immediate sensations, the coming of floods and of thunder-storms, nor scent, like the watch-dog, the smell of death, before the purple spot or the glittering eye have given sign of the fatal infection; but have we not an inward sense that is often

gladdened and saddened by influences from futurity, as the strings of the harp are prophetical of the mood and aspect of to-morrow? Shakspeare has exquisitely described his belief in this philosophy:

> "The southern wind
> Doth play the trumpet to his purposes,
> And by his hollow whistling in the leaves
> Foretells a tempest and a blust'ring day."

And I believe myself to be possessed of the faculty whose power consists of this hereafter sort of discernment; — Sydenham used to call it my genius.

And what is genius, but a sort of something which distinguishes one mind from another, as the differences of figure and feature, mien and complexion, individualise the persons of different men? — We all hear, and see, and taste, and feel, and smell alike, though some have a keener relish of the enjoyments of one sense than those of another.

Some are delighted by the ear with melodious sounds — others by the eye with well ordered forms, and the musical distribution of colours: of such are those artists who address themselves to the imagination. The epicure has his paradise in the palate; the voluptuary in his exquisite touch; and I have sometimes thought that the faculty of the poet was liveliest in his smell; for no other revels so luxuriously in the reveries and ruminations of the aromatic summer, nor finds in the perfume of leaves and flowers such delicious reminiscences of wisdom and beauty. Despite, then, of all controversy and metaphysics, it may be said, as the senses are the gates of the mind, that genius sits as warder at that which is best constructed to give entrance, or, perhaps, that which the circumstances of fortune have made the most frequented — quickness of sense, or a habit of observation.

But whether that melancholy foreknowledge, with which I was so often depressed, came of endowment or of custom, it would be thriftless to investigate: for, as an old musician once told me, such things are too shrewd and subtle ever to be tested by philosophy.

He was a German by birth, and came to Oxford to teach the flute. I was one of his pupils; but soon discovering that he was curiously versed in a peculiar experience, I took lessons from him in a study more congenial to my disposition than even music. He had been bred up from his childhood in the band of a regiment, and yet, such was the dominion which his genius had over him, such his fascination to harmonious sounds, that he remained as simple in his morals and imaginations as the shepherd-boy when he tries his first oaten-pipe, alone on the hills, in the calm of a sunny May morning.

"Is not the sense I have of the speech which is in melody," I have often heard him say, "a gift from Heaven? Think you it was given to delight but idle ears? — That would be to say Providence makes fiddle-strings. — No: there is much prophecy, in all the sounds of nature, speaking to our instinct; but the use of instinct we have lost, and therefore do not understand them. Yes: by the virtue of the oracle in mine ear I have discovered many things that are among the laws and regularities of nature. Those persons, for example, who particularly delight in the delicacies of chromatic melodies, modulated on a flat key, whether they be composers, performers, or listeners, are seldom long-lived. For the most part they die before their forty-second year, though a few, by reason of more strength, do sometimes reach to forty-nine. Such truths cannot be put into the crucibles of philosophy." — And then he would reckon on his

fingers innumerable instances of musicians of that delicate order who died in their youth; adding, "And have I not the witness I most believe in mine own self? I can tell by the key to which the rising corn rustles in the winds of spring, whether the harvest will be plenteous or niggardly; for the world is but a band of instruments that were all once tuned to the same pitch, the celestial key to which the innocent angels tune their harps.—Whenever, therefore, there is any lack of concord with that which was the universal key, expectation will be disappointed, and the harmony of nature vext with some deficiency. In this lieth the mystery of fortune. Those who, by their vigour and intelligence, should be prosperous in health and in worldly circumstances, and yet are always otherwise, are ever sensible of some discord in the diapason of themselves, which mars the effect of their best endeavours in performance."

One night as I was returning home I met this curious hypothetist in the street, and bantered him on his being abroad at so late an hour.

"Speak not so," said he, very seriously, "for I am going to die; I have had my warning. As I stood on the bridge, listening to the tongues which the winds give to the leaves of the trees in the neighbouring gardens, making them all to sing like the little cherubim, I heard a requiem for one that is doomed on the morrow to die."

I attempted to speak lightly of his superstition, though his accent curdled my veins; but he added:

"And when their hymn was sung, I heard the soft low voice of a willow tree, singing an old ditty, — one with which my mother long, long ago, often lulled me to sleep. By the music of the requiem, and the pity which was

in that melody, I know when I next shall fall asleep, I am never to awaken again."

With these words he left me, and in the morning he was found dead of apoplexy. Who, therefore, shall venture to say, that what the German enthusiast called his gift, his instinct, or his genius, was not some incommunicable faculty which made his spirit as different from that of any other man's, as he was in his person distinguishable from every individual of the universal race? — He had faith, however, in the warning of his fate. I have had but a feeling of the import that was ever in the bodements of mine; and by working against it with the traditionary fallacies of reason, I have become — let my story tell what.

CHAP. IX.

In the course of the evening, after leaving the Purcels, I walked at random through the city. I had no object in view; curiosity was asleep: the sense of Maria's beauty alone was glowing on my heart, but with something more of sadness than of delight.

She seemed to me a being of too fine an element to be able to withstand the coarse elbowing and pressure of the rude and jostling world; and love was almost refined into compassion, as I thought of that exquisite delicacy, so like the vestment in which the poet sees the benign cherub Innocence looking at helpless Infancy, as he lies smiling in his sleep, with the remembrance of some joy which the newly embo-

died spirit still retains of its primitive purity — a remembrance so soon to be lost amidst the ails and cares of its incorporation with the dross of mortality.

In that tremulous condition of admiration and tenderness, I continued my aimless sauntering, I know not how long. The sound of an organ, as I happened to pass the open door of a church, first dissolved my reverie. I listened for a moment, and then went in.

It was an old edifice of spacious dimensions, a creation of the gorgeous pageantries of Popery; but the apostolical agency of the Reformation had ravished the shrines. The austere reason of Martin Luther had substituted the homely benches of polemical attention for the thrones and stalls of sacerdotal pomp, and the altars and imageries of sensual contemplation. The aspect was ancient, not ruinous; a faded magni-

ficence, still venerable, reminded me of the splendour which had been extinguished; and a sober twilight bespoke the musings of a more sublime philosophy than those of the faith which is cheered by the flickering of tapers and nourished by the odour of incense.

I sat down on a rush-bottomed chair under the organ-loft. I heard the sound of several voices speaking softly and in whispers around the instrument. The organist, who had been rehearsing the symphony to an anthem, soon after paused. There was nothing in his execution, nor in the subject, to arrest attention; but still the genius of the place rendered the performance profoundly solemn, and I felt that he would have deepened my enjoyment had he continued to play. A considerable interval of silence and of whispering however ensued, and I rose; when, suddenly, as I was on the point of quitting the church, the organ was awakened with a

touch of such enchanting power, that it made me thrill in every fibre, and after a light, but fanciful, prelude, the new performer began an air which came upon me with a delicious and magical influence.—A thousand beautiful phantoms of smiles beamed upon me, the pressure of delightful caresses fondly embraced me, and my heart was, as it were, filled with the indescribable laughter of titulation and ecstasy.

Surely, said I to myself, I have heard that air before; and while I tried to recollect when and where, the musician changed the tune, and played another, which brought the saloon of Beechendale-Hall, with all its crimson grandeur, the talismanic table, and the mystical French clock, as plainly around me as if I had been seated on the carpet, playing with an orange, in the wonderment of childhood.

I continued musing and marvelling at so singular a power, in melodies which were

really deserving of no particular attention, till I was roused by the hand of a stranger on my shoulder. It was General Purcel, who, in consequence of his lady complaining of a slight indisposition, had strolled out with Maria, and had, like myself, accidentally entered the church. Yes; it was her gentle fingers, by which those old and simple airs were summoned from the organ, endowed with such metaphysical power as to charm back the forgotten feelings and emotions of my fondled and happy infancy.—Alas, alas, I ascribed to the particular interest with which she had inspired me an influence that belonged only to the notes she had so exquisitely played;—a ruder touch and a meaner hand would, perhaps, have made the same stops discourse altogether as persuasively.

END OF EPOCH III.

EPOCH IV.

CHAP. I.

It was a beautiful idea of the little boy, and full of poetry too, who, when asked what the mind was, replied, that it must be like a blind child, for its eyes look inwardly.

"We take no note of time," says one of the poets, and it is true; for days, and weeks, and months, and years, pass away, and if they press not the memory with events, have they not, indeed, been as nothing? Verily, doth not all the remembrance we retain of what has chanced,

depend on something in the accident, rather than in aught connected with the shadows of the dial-plate? So has it been with ———. I have not been in fault, and will not say the wretch, but only the wretched victim of an inherited penalty.

On the second day after I landed at Hamburgh, the Purcels embarked for home. According to an inspection of my rent-roll, made on my return to England, when I met them again, I must have been at least four years separated from Maria, and yet so constantly, and so lovely was her image all the while, beaming, smiling, and blushing, and such a claimant on affection, tenderness, and admiration before me, that when I saw her again, I might have declared with unimpeachable sincerity, we had never from the moment of our first meeting been for a moment apart. Sometimes, indeed, the treasuries of Switzerland and Italy might almost be said to have bribed

me to forget her; but it was to such forgetfulness as one has of the glorious sun, when looking at a painted window, enriched with stories, and portraits of kings and famous men, the magnificence of great edifices, and scenes of mountain-landscapes, mitigating, but deriving all the charm of its interest from his beams. I found some grace and brightness of her every where.

But, do I still dream? Have I not been awakened? Is all this desolated world, this blasted heath, on which I am doomed to perish, and all the alarm of fire and of blood by which I was so roused, but things of the reasonless nightmare? Oh my heart! my heart!

CHAP. II.

In the midst of that trance of enchantment when all was Maria, and whatever was either good, or fair, or beautiful, reminded me of some quality that in her was more excellent, a momentary dread often overcame me, and I wished that I could love her less or be sure that she might be mine.

Still these causeless cares were soon mastered, for as such they seemed at the time. I regarded them as the envious suggestions of some evil genius: alas! were they not the dismal intimations of my own guardian angel, in his endeavours to quench that forbidden and unholy fire which I thought so pure— "as genial as the light of heaven?"

From the first time on which Mrs. Purcel observed my attentions to Maria, her beha-

viour towards me underwent an embarrassing change. Naturally gay, and for her years full of grace and playfulness, she became thoughtful, and her eyes were often fixed upon me with a pathetic earnestness, and something like solicitation, as if she beseeched my compassion.

I remarked this unaccountable mystery in her manner, and always particularly when I happened in a morning visit to find her alone; often then in conversation her voice would falter while she was addressing me, and she once remarked with a sigh, that surely I had few friends, and wondered at the circumstance, considering my fortune,—all indicating desire to obtain my confidence. Many such similar things often escaped from her. But when the General or Maria were present she put on a resolution of gaiety, and I could not disguise from myself that she was a woman of consummate art and address.

On one occasion, as we were standing together at a window in the drawing-room, she laid her hand fondly and familiarly on my shoulder. I started at the touch, and she instantly rushed from the room in tears. Could I doubt she regarded me with no common affection?

But even this impassioned extravagance was lost in the all-absorbing influence of Maria, who happened immediately after to come from an adjoining apartment.

In the evening, when I was reading in my lodgings, for this took place in London, the recollection of it suddenly recurred upon me, and I began to ponder on the inconvenience, as I then but thought it, of having interested the mother so much in my favour. I laughed at what I was disposed to regard as an awkward dilemma.—In that moment a knocking at the door roused me from my reverie, and Mrs. Purcel was herself announced.

CHAP. III.

Her eyes were sparkling with a wild and insane brilliancy, and the moment the door was shut she cried,—

"If General Purcel will not forbid your visits, I will. I have come to do so: I can endure them no longer—wretches—"

In saying these words, her articulation became choked with passion, and she sunk upon a sofa, overwhelmed with agitation.

I was myself for the space of several minutes unable to speak: I stood beside her: when I recovered sufficient composure, I entreated her to moderate her displeasure.

"Displeasure!" said she, with an accent of Siddonian pathos, and looked at me with an expression which could never be forgot-

ten, while she snatched my hand, and bathed it with tears.

"Merciful heaven, Madam!" I exclaimed, equivocating with myself; "what does all this mean? Am I not in birth and fortune the equal of your daughter?"

"O yes, O yes," was her wild reply; and she added "too much her equal. Oh, miserable me! and you love her too well."

"Why do you say so?" cried I, alarmed and amazed; "such a declaration becomes not a mother and a wife."

"A mother! a wife!—if you could imagine the scorpions which these words exasperate here;" and she smote her heart as she rose from the sofa, and walked hurriedly across the room, tossing her arms aloft, an appalling spectacle of frenzy and despair.

In this terrific state of perturbation she continued for some time. I was overwhelmed with amazement, and stood like a statue.

Suddenly she appeared to subdue her emotion, and came towards me with an air of resolute calmness, intending to address me; but in the same moment she burst into such a frantic fit of hysterical laughter, that I became alarmed, and rushed towards the door to call for assistance, believing she was indeed mad. She observed my intention, and with a grasp as dreadful and effective as a fiat, she seized me by the arm.

"Hear me," she exclaimed; "hear me, oh, Henry, Henry!"

I shuddered at being so familiarly and so tenderly addressed; but I replied somewhat more self-possessed than I had hitherto been, "Madam, I can be at no loss to understand the cause of this vehemence."

The flash of her eyes withered me for a moment: I paused while she replied:—

"No, no; you do not, you cannot understand it. Sit down on the sofa, sit beside

me: I have worked myself to this, and it shall now be done."

In saying these words, she bent her head upon my shoulder, and wept bitterly. At that moment the sound of a loud knocking reminded me that Sydenham was then to call.

"Is it for you?" said she in alarm; and scarcely had I answered in the affirmative, when she darted out of the room and ran up the second flight of stairs. In the same moment the voice of her husband, at the hall-door, enquiring if I was at home, overwhelmed me, if possible, with still greater consternation. His accent was precise and emphatic; his tread on the stairs, as he ascended, sounded heavily; and when he entered the room, his face was pale, and his dark eyes vividly fierce.

CHAP. IV.

"Is Mrs. Purcel here?" said he, as he approached towards the table on which lay the book I had been reading when she came in. His tone was arrogant, and I could not brook the menace of the aspect with which it was delivered.

"Is she?" was all the answer I gave him: at the same moment I walked towards the fire, and stood on the hearth-rug, eying him, I must however say, with feelings more defensive and compassionate than those with which he appeared to be animated.

Somewhat surprised by the manner with which I regarded him, he paused and looked around much perplexed.

"General Purcel," said I, faintly, "I am at no loss to discover the cause of this singular

visit. My devotion to your daughter is not acceptable to her mother, nor to you: I think you cannot be offended if I enquire the cause on your part."

"On mine there is none," he replied, in a calmer voice; "but Mrs. Purcel, who has always been a woman of uncontrollable caprice, has fallen into frenzy on the subject; and though I am well aware Maria can hardly hope for a more advantageous match, yet her mother is so vehemently opposed to your attachment, which we have both long remarked, that she will listen to no argument on the subject. She insisted to-night in such a manner I should forbid you my house, that I almost suspect she has herself——"

He hesitated, and then after a moment's pause added;—"But it is impossible that the interest you appear to feel for Maria can be a disguise to conceal—"

He paused again, and I replied, "General Purcel, I will not affect to misunderstand you; but I am a man of honour, and a word may appease all suspicions. Will you give me Maria?"

"It must then be without her mother's consent."

"With yours I shall be satisfied, if Maria will."

"It must then be managed secretly; for Mrs. Purcel, when once her feelings or her passions are engaged, though in her milder moments seemingly of a far different order of temper, is deaf to reason, and blind to danger; nothing can repress her vehemence nor rule her wilfulness; she either loves or hates you; whichever is the source of her opposition, is equally beyond reason."

"But," said I, "that can be only while the feeling lasts."

"Till it is gratified," was his solemn and emphatic reply.

"Then, if to expect any mitigation of her opposition be so hopeless, and you are willing, may I presume to ask the hand of Maria?"

"You have her heart, I think, and you have my consent; but be wary, and let me be no more seen in it than is absolutely necessary;" and he smiled, as he added, "such things will happen in the best regulated families."

At that moment I heard a rustling on the landing-place, and expected to see Mrs. Purcel burst into the room; but she descended in the dark, and escaped from the house.

It is not required of me to mention what farther passed with the General, and I dare no longer trust my pen with any reflections. Facts are all I may now venture to record.—The fetters of perdition were rivetted; the spells

that were to burst in horror had taken effect —the victims were now fastened to the stake —but they had no sense of their condition; they were happy in a flowery, an arborous Sicilian garden: the volcano was below, and the giant earthquake only asleep.

CHAP. V.

I HAVE remarked in my own experience two kinds of somnambular perception; the one, ordinary and common to all sorts of minds, but the other is strange, inscrutable, and prophetical; of rare occurrence even among those who are saddened with the melancholy endowment. The same thing has, I imagine, been often observed before, and been distinguished by thoughtful men with the discriminative epithets of dreams and visions. The former, as I think, consist of the involuntary remembrance and association of impressions which have been made on the senses, and are but the mere metaphorical clothing of unregulated reflection; the latter are apocalyptical admo-

nitions from heaven, — and of this kind was the omen of my sleep in that fatal night.

I had a vision of an ancient church: banners and carved stalls, and stately tombs, and long avenues of columns, stained with the many-coloured dim religious light of painted windows, were around me. I stood before the altar, with Maria as my bride: her father was there, and the priest was reading the service. I had the ring ready, when, suddenly, in the place of Maria, I beheld her mother; still the ceremony proceeded as if there had been no change, but when the visionary bride raised her hand to receive the ring, the beauty of it became dust, and she offered but the cany fingers of a skeleton.

Although fate was in the revelation and in the tumultuous feelings with which I awoke, I yet soon reasoned myself into a calm interpretation of the omen.

The unequivocal affection Mrs. Purcel had shown for me explained the source of the imagining which brought her to mar the marriage, and the vision then appeared but the drowsy reminiscence of the scenes of the evening. Still, however, that mouldering mummy hand was ever before me, suggesting the dread of some hideous combination of unmixable and forbidden things. Weddings and funerals mingled together, and banquets at which the dead sat in their cerements.

Nevertheless, in the morning I sent for Sydenham; and having informed him of what had passed, he undertook to make the necessary arrangements for the completion of my happiness: — happiness! and in the evening I wrote to General Oglethorp, to tell him of my choice. By this time he was become very aged and infirm: he resided constantly at Bath, and seldom went abroad; but we frequently corresponded; and although I had

not before told him of my attachment to Maria Purcel, he was yet aware of my intention to marry, and that I had selected my partner.

CHAP. VI.

It was not thought necessary that the preparations for the wedding should be of any particular splendour: on the contrary, it was determined that as soon as the ceremony was over, we should proceed on a tour to the Highlands of Scotland. All that was deemed requisite Sydenham undertook to arrange; and in consequence of the impassioned opposition of Mrs. Purcel, it was agreed that the General, on the pretext of showing Maria the curiosities of the Tower, should bring her to a church in the city, where the service might be performed, without the hazard of interruption from her mother; for some extraordinary violence, in the event of discovery, was apprehended from her.

It was necessary, however, that proper settlements should be prepared in the mean time; and, accordingly, as the lawyers required three days to make up the writings, that interval was allowed to them; but they obtained more than a week by an event signal and appalling.

Instead of receiving an answer from General Oglethorp by return of the post, he came himself from Bath, and suddenly entered my room while Sydenham was with me. I rose to receive him with feelings of the liveliest delight. To see him in town, on the occasion, was far more than I had ventured to expect, considering his infirmities and the length of the journey. But in an instant the joy was extinguished; for, on offering me his hand, he uttered a wild and feeble shriek, and sunk at my feet in speechless and powerless paralysis.

I will not dwell on the scene. In the course of the same day he died. Thus, as it appeared, was the frightful vision which had so scared my sleep awfully realised, and the preparations for a wedding turned indeed into those for a funeral.

But though the event was in itself so well calculated to fill my bosom with solemnity and sorrow, it had yet a far other effect. I was, as it were, lightened and lifted out of my accustomed superstitious apprehensions, and I felt eager and impatient of any occurrence which impeded the consummation of my fate.

Before the excellent old man was committed to the earth, Sydenham procured the license; and the day of the entombment was appointed for the joyous celebration of my wedding.

I shrink and I shudder when I now recall to mind the infatuation that made me join things which nature has so impressively placed asunder. Sydenham urged me to pause, — to

sacrifice to decorum; but his argument and eloquence were unavailing. General Purcel, too, entreated me to let but a week pass over. I was, however, obstinate; and he brought me letters from Maria, all asking delay; but I regarded them as the suggestions of his own weakness.

The morning and the hour being in consequence of my inflexible determination so fixed, and General Purcel having agreed to attend the funeral, it was resolved that the marriage-ceremony, instead of taking place as previously arranged, should be performed in Westminster-Abbey, where the remains of my uncle were to be laid, and immediately after the burial.

That such an unnatural mixture of irreconcilable rites should ever have been consented to by a creature so full of tenderness and of such unparalleled delicacy as Maria, is not the least wonder in our dismal story;

but she was fastened to the same chain by which I was drawn on. It was thought by us that the horrible stratagem of joining the funeral and the wedding together would never be suspected by Mrs. Purcel.

CHAP. VII.

THE funeral procession moved towards the Abbey as the clock was striking seven: — the service was read and the burial completed. The friends of my uncle who had come to pay the last tribute of their regard had retired, and General Purcel and myself also left the church; but instead of going back to the coach which had brought us, we walked into the cloisters.

Sydenham was not at the funeral. Maria with a young friend and her maid were under his charge in a house in Abingdon-Street; and as soon as the hearse and the remains of the pageantry left the Abbey, they entered the church by Poets' Corner.

Except the clergyman, and the servants of the Cathedral, there were no spectators. —

By some inexplicable influence, however, my valet, of his own accord, remained at the door to prevent interruption, and the ceremony proceeded; but just in the moment when I was in the act of putting on the ring, he came rushing towards us with such an expression of consternation in his countenance, that I was startled and alarmed before he had power to tell his fear. In the same moment Maria screamed, for her mother entered the church, pale, dishevelled, and frantic, crying, "I forbid the bands — brother and sister — brother and sister!" I heard no more: — the vast edifice reeled, as it were, around me, and the pillars and monuments seemed as if they were tumbling upon my head; and then there is a hiatus in my remembrance, a chasm in my life.

When I recovered from the shock, under which I had fallen senseless on the pavement, I found myself at home in my own cham-

ber, and Sydenham standing mournfully at my bed-side. — I asked no questions, but pressed his hand.

"The carrriage," said he, "is at the door, and I will go with you."

I made no answer, but rose, for I had not been undressed, and followed him to the carriage.

Ten years have passed since that dreadful morning, and I have never opened my lips to enquire the issues of the event; but one day, about two years ago, in visiting the English cemetery at Lisbon, I saw on a marble slab, which the weather or accident had already partly defaced, the epitaph of Maria. The remainder of my own story is but a tissue of aimless and objectless wanderings and moody meditations, under the anguish of the inherited curse. — But all will soon be over: — a tedious hectic that has long been consuming me, reluctantly and

slowly, hath at last, within these few days, so augmented its fires, that I am conscious, from a sentiment within, I cannot survive another month; I have, indeed, had my warning. Twice hath a sound like the voice of my sister startled my unrefreshing sleep: when it rouses me for the third time, then I shall awake to die.

FINIS.

POSTSCRIPT.

THE original letters from which the foregoing narrative has been extracted, rather than compiled, were addressed to the late Sir George Shelbrooke, K.C.B., and extended nearly to the number of a hundred. About ten years ago they were given to a relation of the editor, for the purpose of being published entire; but it was then thought that the recollection of the principal incident was still too fresh in the minds of many persons of quality to justify such a measure, especially as they contained observations calculated to wound the feelings of an amiable family.

After the death of Sir George, the manuscripts were allowed to remain with the gentleman in whose hands they had been left, by that excellent man and distinguished officer, till the beginning of last year, when

he delivered them to the editor, expressing at the same time a wish, as his own infirm health prevented him from engaging in the arduous task of superintending the publication, that he would adopt some means to lay before the world, a moral lesson so impressive in itself and so instructive by its consequences. This led to a correspondence with Mr. Blackwood, who, even without seeing the papers, declared himself to be so affected by the story, that he would willingly publish the whole series in his Magazine. Conduct so liberal commanded equal confidence, and the letters were accordingly sent to Edinburgh; but, on submitting them to Mr. North, his confidential adviser in literary matters, that eminent scholar made some objection to certain personal strictures in them, as rendering many of the letters unfit for their miscellany, and in consequence the design of an entire publication was a second time abandoned.

Mr. Blackwood, however, suggested, that by omitting minute details and reflections on individuals, the letters would still afford materials, from which an interesting story might be constructed. This task the editor has accordingly endeavoured to perform, with as close an adherence to the original text, as the nature of the work would permit. But it is the public who will judge of the manner in which he has executed this difficult and delicate undertaking; and, when the distance of his residence from London is considered, he trusts, that the few errors of the press which may here and there be detected, especially the unaccountable orthography of Magdeline for Magdalen, will not be objected as faults of a very offensive complexion.

B. A. M.

Castle-Bromage,
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